Felix

I don't recall the circumstances surrounding my oldest daughter' running and screaming into the house on Lynvalley Crescent in Scarborough, that our male house cat, Buster, had a piece of metal caught in his paw. He was in the back yard hiding in the shed. My wife (at the time) and I went quickly out to the garden shed where Buster sat patiently on the grass now, just near the trailer, with an S hook embedded in his furry skin. How it got there we would never know. We don't speak kitty katty. Buster didn't seem to complain after it was removed. We held him firmly and pulled the S hook slowly out of his leg.

Buster did complain, however, later that same Spring. Quiet as he was, he was not so innocent. Buster had been acquired from the local Pound the year before, for our two year old daughter as a birthday present. They had probably named him as well but we chose the name Buster. It was also the security name we used for safety, the secret password if for example a taxi or stranger to them had to pick them up from school etc. Buster would be the Safe Word for them to trust someone that they didn't know.

Buster's innocence disappeared where birds were concerned. He was definitely quick and the birds fluttered by windows all the time. One sunny, late Spring day as I was walking home from getting off the bus after work, I saw my daughters standing in the front yard on the grass, laughing. I looked up and saw a dozen or so, Starlings on the telephone wires above the driveway, dive bombing Buster as he sat on the asphalt in the middle of the driveway on the edge of the sidewalk.

Buster stayed like with us for a couple of small house moves and the big city move from Toronto to London. He could be found sleeping on a window sill, in the bathroom sink, or sitting in any and every cardboard box. Twice he was found batting a mouse up against the wall of the garage like a ping pong ball. He would also wedge himself between my wife and I when we were going to sleep or making love, as if to say; boring, be quiet I'm tired and I want to go to sleep, again. He died at the age of fifteen of Cancer. The moment he went to animal Heaven I looked up from where I sat at the Sears Animal Hospital on Wharncliffe and the only cloud in the sky was shaped just like a Snoopy dog and soon dissipated as it drifted by in the dark blue sky.

At the young middle age of forty-five I decided to go back to school. I registered and was accepted into the Library Science program at Fanshawe College for a change of profession from thirty years of horticulture. As a hobby I had been writing and publishing since my first college days in my twenties.

When I began to attend classes I was also involved in the poetry scene and made several close friends and helped establish the London Arts Council and was National Coordinator for the Canadian Poetry Association. One of my soon to be, best friends, Graham McGeorge, was the superintendent of a small apartment building on the old McClary Estate. Mr. McClary once owned the GM manufacturing plant on Adelaide St. At the Thames River. In my 2009 apartment stood a McClary refrigerator. I moved into 11 McClary with a one year old kitten, Leviathan, which my oldest daughter, Leanne, had given me when he was three months old.

On the weekends I would put the leash on Levi and go for walks around the High & Grand St. Neighborhood. Levi never walked beside me but sat balanced on the throne of my shoulder like a little prince. During the week when I got home from college or after my volunteer work at the London Community Resource Center, Levi appeared to be both agitated and

vociferous. The weekends seemed to be fine all throughout the Fall and Winter.

In my own view and opinion and not from some cat care book, I felt that, as with a human baby, my cat needed the sound of the human voice so I left the CBC channel playing all day long from the stereo while I was at school. By the Spring, Levi seemed to have developed about fifteen different ways to say meow as he sat on the doorway everyday when I came home from school. I thought he was yelling at me for being away all day. Returning to my creative endeavours I composed a stream of thought piece from his point of view:

> These are not peaceful times upon which I can calmly count out the inequalities in my life nor are these joyful times as my manner leaps and falls at the same time over sometimes, the same events and darkness falls early on my shadow in these, not peaceful times where I remain, in camera, a solitary rock upon which leaves cover traces of grains of gneiss, striations of dark and light as these days are now, because I feel I'm losing you, or am I just losing your love to these aforementioned inequalities in my life as I've become more silent now, speaking less of mutual things and trapping your emotions as a scull traps water in a race against time, mine, yours and ours because time races against no one person or thing inside this room where there is no cold, no rain, no fear, no pain; there is no light either and you are outside of this life growing older, growing better, smiling through the barren trees whose leaves have been tumbling and falling against my window pane lately while you race merrily about town knowing who you are and where you are going, growing, gathering shadows about you to keep your dreams warm at night under the blankets of thought you purchase from the people you call friends, a word that fills your own heart and thoughts much easier than it fills mine as I have so few unless I dream of you and your influence but I need more than your touch to pull me out of this room full of inequality and unrest, I need your strength and the strength of your heart, your hand, your comradery and that certain something that I have been searching for all of my days that has kept me in the dark for so long, occasionally to let in the light, some fresh air, food of the Gods, spring flowers, knowledge of the outside world where you play, where you stay away from me but here at the same time, and you engulf my emotions, swallow my ego, unchain my skin, feel my breath's heat upon your freedom and you know I don't want you to come to me but pull me to join you in more peaceful times to help balance the inconsistency for every thing must change and I must change and you, you should not change but love and live and give life where I only take it away, push it back into the corners of my shadowed room as I sit between the wall and the fridge on the small tiles with my face in my hands and rivers flow from my soul until I can cry no more into this flooded room until it has drained away and the room is bereft of all things and there is but one tear left in the Guff and in this naked flesh which rolls from this orb onto the lip and drips off into the void, down, down, down onto the tiles at my aching feet, explode into light and color while the walls fade away and bricks disappear, windows open and the light floods in with the air and I find you, arms outstretched, standing there.

This piece was well received at Open Mic readings and I would soon find out why Levi was so vociferous.

As luck would have it, I became slightly ill with a cold and decided to skip school and stay home for a couple of days to recover. I took the bus downtown and transferred to the 6

Richmond bus and got home just after lunch and slept the afternoon away. At about 9:30 the next morning as I sickly sat sipping a cup of Earl Grey in the livingroom, the City garbage truck reversed all the way down the side of my building. As my apartment was in the basement of the building, at the front edge of the building, the back up beeper echoed in my apartment louder than it sounded on the outside of the building.

I immediately had my answer to the excited yelping and mewing and his anxiety. As the garbage truck reversed, a terribly frightened kitten ran back and forth from one end of the apartment to the other faster than anything I had ever seen; and had been doing this activity of fear every month since we had moved in. He was even afraid to get up on the window ledge to look out. We moved as soon as possible to a nearby apartment building with a Lesbian roommate, and whole Levi continued to talk a lot, he gradually relaxed and spent quality time in the hallway with a Basset Hound from the apartment next door.

When my daughter, Leanne, moved into the first house I had owned since the divorce, she brought her large orange male Tabby, Pharaoh. My, at the time, welter weight ten year old grey Tabby, who had spent his life alone with me, sat on the burgundy chair as Pharaoh sat on the royal blue living room couch under the window. Pharaoh was a typical macho male cat. Solitary by nature and not by circumstance. To both Leanne's and my astonishment, Levi jumped off of the chair, crossed the floor, leaped up onto the couch and curled up against Pharaoh and began licking his face and head. Pharaoh then reciprocated like they had been best friends forever. On occasion, but separately, both cats would follow me along the outlines of the houses along the street, to the bus stop at 11:00 pm when I caught the bus to go to work on the midnight shift at the post office, then go back home. Neither listened to be along the way as I told them to return to the house.

I was thinking of this three years later on a cold, windy, overcast and snowy weekend at my new bachelor apartment after the bankruptcy took my second home. The apartment was situated down a gravel back alley behind the T&C Bar and Laundromat on Dundas just east of Adelaide two blocks. I heard the screen door blow open and found it strange that it didn't blow shut again.

Levi sat up, startled by the sudden noise and stared at the open door. I got up from the computer in the make-shift bedroom-office-dining room and went over to the screen door, opened it to reveal a smaller, feral, fight scratched and snow covered version of Pharaoh,

The mangy orange male cat entered the small livingroom, looked around like he owned the place and went straight to the cat food dish, then found the bathroom litter box and returned to the living room where he sat on the edge of the wool rug my parents had brought back from Cairo the year before.

In the mean time, Levi watched all of this, not with a sense of territory or ownership but with something I hadn't thought older cats would have, memory as well as trust. I saw and knew immediately that this was not my daughter's cat. Levi though, saw the only thing he had ever had and pushing himself off of the couch, headed straight for what he perceived as his one and only old best friend and licked his face and his fur.

It took only a minute or two to realize this was no feral cat. As fight torn and scabby skinned it was, you could tell that it was a lost or pushed out of the door, house cat at one time. He reciprocated with what seemed like love and licks to Levi, who probably didn't know the difference then or until he died years later at the age of nineteen, laying between two female cats

owned by another roommate.

The orange cat I never named, stayed the months of January and February 2006, much healed and improved and maybe a pound or two heavier. Unlike his new brother and friend, Levi, who never seemed to grow larger than when he was two or three years old. One day when the weather was about to break and the door was ajar for air and light, the orange Tabby walked out the door, looked back before entering the two acre field on the other side of the back alley and disappeared, never to return.

Levi seemed perplexed for a couple of weeks and then began hiding under the sink cabinet and looking rather sad and lonely as he sat motionless sometimes on the top of the toilet tank. Upon further and more detailed inspection I found that his new friend had left more than memories. He had left fleas on every square inch of fur.

I sprayed the apartment after giving Levi a flea bath and shampoo in the tub and leaving him in the bathroom for two days to dry and recover. By the end of March he was back to his normal cat self and seemed to have forgotten Pharaoh's Doppelganger and friend. One day he scratched at the door, bounced onto the snowless gravel lane and walked away towards Lyle Street without so much as a goodbye.

I searched and called for him everyday to no avail. If he was looking for the orange cat or escaping the memory of months of fleas, I'll never know. What I do know is that two weeks to the day that he left, he did return. This small and seemingly shy cat appeared on the Lyle Street sidewalk and came down the alley to the apartment steps in front of two much larger male cats who had the appearance of bodyguards.

I placed dry food on the steps until all three were fed, then the two bodyguards , at the same unknown signal, left and walked away. Levi sauntered into the apartment as if nothing had happened and fell asleep on a spot of sunshine and never left home again until the day he died.

Levi

Pharaoh

Buster